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SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN: CONTROVERSIAL RELIGIOUS SIGNS APPEAR ON AMMAN'S
STREETS

REF: A) AMMAN 2452, B) AMMAN 2385, C) AMMAN 2227, D) 08 AMMAN 2973,
E) 08 AMMAN 1395

¶1. (U) Controversial religious signs with statements, such as "know that you will die", "headscarf or suffer" and "never look at women," have appeared throughout Amman during Autumn 2009. The signs are posted in areas with heavy traffic and can be found on electricity poles, traffic lights, and near advertisement billboards. The organization or individual(s) behind the signs remain unknown but the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) has stated it is investigating the matter. The Director of GAM's municipal department calls the signs "illegal" because they violate regulations regarding promotions and because no permission to post such signs was requested or granted.

¶2. (U) The signs, which local media started to cover on November 15, have generated significant attention and even debate. The media has largely commented that the signs are "terrorizing" citizens. Most individuals interviewed believe, despite the intended impact, that the signs do not promote a positive view of religious beliefs. A 20-year-old student, quoted in an article in Al Ghad newspaper, believes that the signs would actually scare people away or spread ideas that have nothing to do with religion. Many others appear to agree and believe that if the author(s) wanted citizens to become closer to their religion then less drastic or threatening expressions should be used instead. Other citizens have expressed concern that the signs will promote extremism or even terrorism among Jordan's youth.

¶3. (U) Not everyone agrees, however, that the signs are harmful. Shari'a law professor, Dr. Hamdi Murad, believes that the signs serve as a good warning for people to "beware of the fires of hell," as long as they conform to Islamic teachings. Murad cites a Koranic verse to back his stance that recommends wisdom and advice be combined with persuasion to show the path to God and potential wrath. The Muslim Brotherhood(MB) denies posting the signs but has criticized the city for paying close attention to the signs and not other advertisements that are "harmful to public taste." MB Controller General, Dr. Hammam Sa'id, has publically stated that those responsible for the signs will be rewarded as they remind people of life and death.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The appearance of these religious signs on Amman's streets has exposed generally concealed differences within Jordanian society regarding religious dialogue and beliefs. The signs highlight the royal family's and government's continued challenge of balancing the public's competing views and concerns without potentially destabilizing certain segments of Jordanian society. End Comment.

BEECROFT